

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 1, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We are gravely concerned about the effects of the thirty-five-day government shutdown on wildfire prevention efforts in California and other western states. The loss of over a month of prevention and mitigation efforts could have disastrous effects, and therefore we urge you to take immediate action to make up for lost time.

Over the past year, California was struck by a wave of historic wildfires that stretched the entire length of the state, making 2018 the deadliest and most destructive year in modern history. For example, in November, the Camp Fire torched over 150,000 acres, killing more than 80 people and damaging or destroying nearly 20,000 structures. Disasters of this scale are becoming the norm rather than the exception, with six of the ten most destructive wildfires in state history occurring in just the past four years. The bottom line is that fire prevention and preparedness efforts are more important than ever.

As a result of the lapse in government appropriations, it is our understanding that some preparations for the upcoming year were delayed or cancelled. Critical activities such as hazardous fuels removal, training and hiring of new firefighting personnel, and other mitigation efforts were put on hold. Given the nearly year-round threat of fire, the winter months are critical for forest managers to be able to get a head start on clearing dead and dry fuels. Such preparation can be the difference between a contained fire and a conflagration that leaves thousands homeless and countless businesses destroyed.

As Representatives from the State of California, we ask that you respond to us with a full accounting of firefighting and fire prevention activities that were affected by the government shutdown from December 21st to January 25th, including, but not limited to:

- 1) the estimated number of acres of hazardous fuels in California that should have been cleared during the period of the shutdown;
- 2) any changes to the hiring process for California-based firefighting personnel due to the shutdown and a status update on 2019 hiring efforts;
- 3) the extent of activities that should have been performed by contractors who were furloughed;
- 4) any and all wildfire-related training activities that were delayed or cancelled;

- 5) the steps the Department is undertaking to make up for the lost time to ensure that preparedness is not harmed and any associated costs with such accelerated efforts.

All of the above-mentioned activities are essential to ensuring that our firefighters and forest managers are fully prepared and equipped to fight fires in the upcoming year. Failure to do so risks the lives of our firefighters and the communities they protect.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to your reply and to continuing to work together to ensure the safety and security of our constituents.

Sincerely,



Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



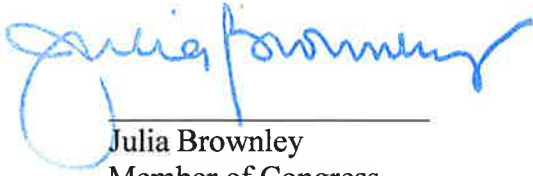
Mike Thompson
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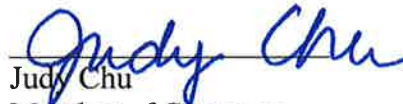
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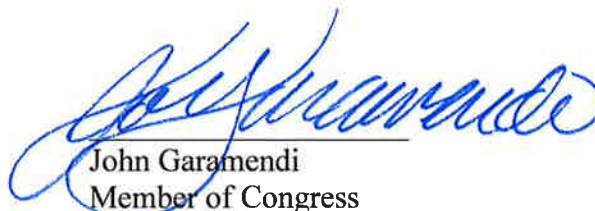
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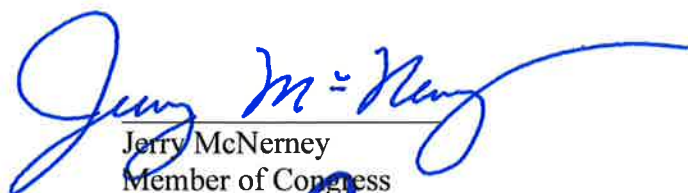
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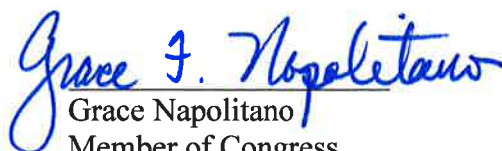
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



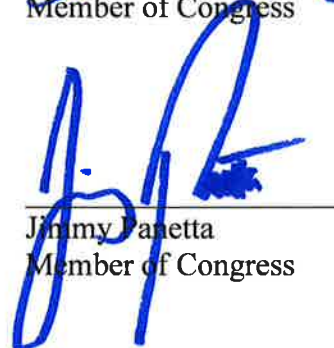
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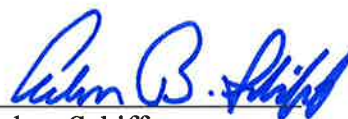
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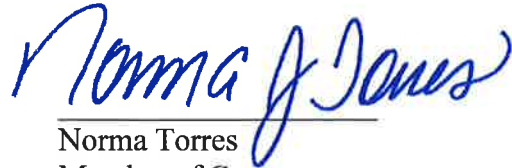
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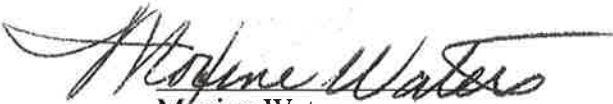
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